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SUBJECT: SPLM INSIDER SAMSON KWAJE ON CENSUS, CABINET RESHUFFLE,
ABYEI, AND LRA

11. (SBU) Summary: Consul General and visiting polchief met with Government of Southern Sudan (GoSS) Agriculture Minister Samson Kwaje January 7. Kwaje is considered a close advisor of GoSS President and GNU First Vice President Salva Kiir (background and bio notes are included at the end of this cable). Kwaje accused the National Congress Party (NCP) of blocking the census but acknowledged that a delay is in the interests of the SPLM so that more refugees and IDPs can return to southern Sudan. Kwaje said that Kiir will discuss Abyei with GNU Second Vice President Taha today in an effort to resolve the current fighting there. Kwaje, who is deputy SPLM mediator for the Lord's Resistance Army Peace Talks, said that SPLM representatives had recently been to LRA leader Joseph Kony's camp in Congo (a six-hour walk from the border) and confirmed that Kony intends to continue the peace process. The LRA told the SPLM that although Vincent Otti is dead, Kony did not kill him. End summary.

Census

12. (SBU) Newly-arrived Consul General Chris Datta and visiting Khartoum polchief met with newly-appointed GoSS Agriculture Minister January 7. Although given ample opportunity to address agricultural issues, Kwaje appeared somewhat bored by the topic and preferred to talk about politics. Kwaje repeated familiar accusations that the NCP is blocking implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) and well-worn claims that the NCP has tried to convince the SPLM to make a deal to delay elections indefinitely. However, Kwaje also acknowledged that conducting the census in April 2008 is not in the interests of the SPLM. He said there are over 100,000 southern Sudanese refugees in Kenya and Ethiopia who may return to southern Sudan this year, as well as many IDPs in the north who may return. Kwaje claimed the NCP is bribing southern IDPs in the north with offers of land, while simultaneously blocking census questions about religion and ethnicity, in order to swell northern census data relative to the south. Nonetheless, Kwaje said the census could occur in April and that the population data could be corrected later during the voter registration process. CG Datta and polchief urged Kwaje to ensure that the SPLM takes the moral high ground and does everything in its power to ensure a timely census, to demonstrate that it is doing everything possible to implement the CPA.

Cabinet Reshuffle and Abyei

13. (SBU) Kwaje viewed the recent cabinet reshuffle positively and observed that the SPLM now has "loyal SPLM members" in Khartoum to negotiate with the NCP. Kwaje echoed comments of other SPLM members in Juba that Pagan Amum's appointment as Minister of Cabinet is critical in order to bring forceful SPLM leadership to Khartoum. Kwaje said that GNU First Vice President Kiir, in addition to meeting January 7 with President Bashir in Khartoum, would also meet

with Second Vice President Ali Osman Taha to discuss possible solutions to the Abyei crisis. He said that they would mainly discuss ways to resolve the current fighting between Misseriya Arab and SPLA forces, but would also address the border issue. Kwaje accused the NCP of using the annual migration of Misseriya Arab herdsmen to stoke conflict and destabilize the area, and to push Dinka populations further south of the Abyei border in a blatant land grab.

Lord's Resistance Army

14. (SBU) Kwaje was most animated when discussing recent information regarding the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). Kwaje is the SPLM's deputy mediator for the LRA peace talks. He said SPLM representatives had traveled to LRA leader Joseph Kony's camp in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) on Christmas day 2007. He said they walked six hours through the jungle to reach the camp, and they found it to be heavily fortified with a series of well-guarded access gates. Kwaje estimated that Kony still has at least 1000 fighters, though he did not say they were all in this one particular camp. (Comment: This figure seems high for one camp to support itself. His next remark was that Ugandan President Museveni should not think he can win militarily, so the figure seemed linked to supporting this conclusion. However, Kwaje claimed the LRA "guerillas" have turned away from pillaging and have taken up farming, claiming to have seen large areas under cultivation within the LRA camp, making it now self sufficient. As proof of this, he claimed that the local population no longer lived in fear of attacks by the group. He also implied that if the LRA is attacked and driven out of this camp, they will have no choice but to resume their predatory former ways. This all seems highly doubtful to us, but Kwaje claims first-hand knowledge. End comment.)

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15. (SBU) Kwaje reported that the LRA told his envoys that Vincent Otti is dead, but that Kony did not kill him. Two LRA reps claimed that they had been detained along with Otti, and that Otti had been killed when a scuffle broke out in the camp. Kwaje said there was no evidence that the LRA fighters had been attacking civilians or looting food, and said there had been no reports of LRA attacks on civilians in Sudan. Regarding the next round of talks, Kwaje said that LRA negotiators will travel to Juba within two weeks. Kwaje said the LRA reps had told the SPLM envoys that Kony still supports the peace process.

Comment

16. (SBU) Kwaje seems to be well-placed politically in the SPLM. His ministry is housed in a new facility, was crowded with staff and visitors when we visited, and Kwaje's own office is the most opulent we have seen in Juba. At a dinner hosted by President Kiir and his top ministers for U.S. Congressman Payne January 7, Kwaje seemed to be one of the top movers along with Minister of the Presidency Luka Biong Deng and newly-appointed Governor of Jonglei State Kwol Manyang.

Background and Bio Notes

17. (SBU) Agriculture Minister Samson Kwaje was shifted to this position during the October 2007 Government of Southern Sudan cabinet reshuffle (timed with the GNU reshuffle of SPLM Ministers), the second reshuffle since the establishment of the Government of Southern Sudan. In contrast to the July 2007 reshuffle, which expanded the cabinet and GoSS executive service in order to stabilize nascent tribal rifts in the South (it largely succeeded, bringing in former SSDF commander Ismael Konye and appointed the first-ever Minister of SPLA Affairs Oyai Deng), the October reshuffle is regarded by most as a move by President Kiir to put the right people in the right jobs. The GoSS appears to be evolving beyond "crisis management" into more active governance. GoSS ministers previously awarded positions chiefly aimed at keeping Kiir's inner circle of advisors together, were re-positioned to take

up portfolios directly relevant to their personal areas of expertise. Kawje (who has a PhD in Agriculture) was previously Minister of Information.

¶8. (SBU) Kwaje was a core member of the SPLM/A negotiating team in Naivasha, remains an influential member of the SPLM, and a vocal participant in the party's Interim National Committee and Interim Political Bureau meetings. His access to GoSS President Kiir is significant, and stems from previously-held administrative, political and diplomatic positions in the SPLM/SPLA during the civil war. He is a "Garangist," but this has not tempered his relationship with Kiir. Kwaje believes Kiir can be persuaded to run for the national presidency in 2009 if pushed by the USG. USG-funded polling suggests that only a Muslim member of the SPLM can win at the national level, but Kwaje disputes this.

¶9. (SBU) Kwaje is Deputy Mediator for the LRA Peace Talks (the Chief Mediator is GoSS Vice President Riek Machar) and was a member of the joint SPLM/NCP executive committee talks that improved the pace of CPA implementation in early 2007 before the disastrous May 2007 meeting that led to Kiir's refusal to travel to Khartoum until August. Kwaje was also part of the SPLM delegation at the September 2007 AU Peace and Security Commission meeting focused on the CPA. Despite GoSS Minister of the Presidency Luka Biong Deng's leanings toward secession, Kwaje and Deng have an excellent relationship and appear to be among the inner circle that the SPLM party turns to in Juba to encourage Kiir when his enthusiasm for the struggle with the NCP in Khartoum wanes. Kwaje has also been credited by Pagan Amum and current (SPLM) GNU Foreign Minister Deng Alor with expanding Kiir's tendency for a parochial view of the South toward a more strategic and comprehensive view of the entire country.

¶10. (SBU) Kwaje was appointed Minister of Information, Radio and Television in the Government of Southern Sudan (GOSS) in October 2005. Prior to the signing of the CPA, Kwaje held several influential positions in the SPLA/M including Spokesman. Before joining SPLM/A, Kwaje served as Minister of Finance in the Equatoria regional government in the mid-1980s. Kwaje obtained a Bachelor's degree in agriculture from Makerere University in the early 1960s and a Master's and PhD in plant protection in the United States in the 1970s. Prior to joining the SPLM/A, Dr. Kwaje was a member of the People's Progressive Party (PPP) that sought the re-division of the South into the three regions of Equatoria, Bahr El Ghazal and Upper Nile. Kwaje comes from the Pojulu tribe, one of the Bari-speaking ethnic groups of Central Equatoria. He was born in Lainya o/a 1950. He speaks English, Arabic and Bari.

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FERNANDEZ